

## **SEXUAL FREEDOM GOD'S WAY**

### **1 Corinthians 7:1–9**

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1 Corinthians 7:1–9 (NIV)

“Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”

Before we look specifically at these nine verses, I want to share with you three errors that are commonly practiced regarding a passage like 1 Corinthians 7.

One error that is practiced is to avoid such a subject altogether. That is the error of being silent when the Bible clearly speaks on a matter. C. S. Lewis said, “When the devil sends error into the world he also sends it in pairs”—two opposite extremes. One way that he sends error into the world in regard to sexual matters is to focus one’s attention so dominantly on them that they’re unable to function or to think of anything else. Another error, on the other side, equally as bad, is to act as though God did not create us with bodies—to be silent when the Word speaks.

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I learned, several years ago, that one of the advantages of expository preaching is ultimately, by preaching systematically through the Scripture, the whole counsel of God is declared to the whole people of God. When I first came as pastor, several years ago, after I'd been at the church for several months, I felt the Lord leading me to preach from the Book of Leviticus. I fought that very strongly for two reasons. Some of you are aware of this. One reason why I fought that is there have been more Bible reading resolutions break down in the wilderness of Leviticus than perhaps any other portion of Scripture. I thought, "Lord, if I start out preaching through Leviticus, in a few months, everyone's going to be gone." The second thing was, I honestly did not know how to handle Leviticus 15 from the pulpit. I didn't know how to read it from the pulpit, let alone preach from it, because it has to do with sensitive bodily matters such as bodily discharges of all kinds.

I remember remonstrating with the Lord about the direction I felt—going through Leviticus. The Lord gave me two answers. One was that all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching and training in righteousness for correction. And surely God intended the Book of Leviticus to be profitable for teaching, for practical everyday living today. The second thing which He, in effect, said to me was, "I'm not going to show you how to treat Leviticus 15 until you're there. So I won't give you an answer in advance." God doesn't speak to me audibly. But these were the impressions on my heart. "When you get there, you'll know." So I started out in Leviticus, with fear and trembling, not knowing what to do when I came to Leviticus 15. I remember the Monday morning I started to do the research. I thought, "Lord, what are you going to show me now from Leviticus 15?" The Lord gave me an approach to that Scripture which has since been my favorite understanding of the nature of God. The message which the Lord gave me was titled "A Very Personal God." It went along the lines of something like this, "You think

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God is remote. You think He's way up in the heavens somewhere, that He doesn't know you.

That He doesn't possibly understand what you're going through?" Read Leviticus 15. He knows you very well. After all, He is the engineer. He's the designing engineer. He knows every facet of our personality, of our physical framework, nothing is unknown to Him. The Word, therefore, speaks very clearly about matters which perhaps, out of a sense of propriety, we might refrain from talking about. The fact that Scripture speaks about these matters, though, ought to correct a false sense of propriety.

Paul has actually been sent a letter by the Corinthians, and he now begins to answer questions which they have raised in their letter. The first 6 chapters, he deals with concerns that are on his heart that they haven't asked him about. But whenever he uses the phrase in Corinthians "Now concerning," it's in response to a letter that has been written in which, perhaps, they've asked him questions about sex and marriage. So chapter 7 answers that question. In chapter 8, persons have asked him questions about food offered to idols. He answers that question there. In chapter 12, others have asked him questions about spiritual gifts. He answers that question. In chapter 16, some ask about the collection for the saints, and he answers that question.

Paul is not at all hesitant, in chapter 7, to openly share an answer with the entire congregation regarding sex and marriage. A mixed multitude of men and women and young people and children. Therefore, Scripture is not silent on matters which sometimes we might be.

A second thing I think that we ought to realize, in looking at a passage like 1 Corinthians 7, is the false idea of believing that sexual freedom is Satan's idea. We have been sold a bill of goods by the world, today, that real freedom comes in throwing aside the restraints that God has established or that real freedom is found outside of marriage. We recognize in going back to the Scripture—Genesis 1:31 and 2:25—that God created man and woman, male and female, He

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created them and He said that His creation was good. The original human family, Adam and Eve, are described as both being naked before God and not ashamed. God saw to it that, among the joys that He would give to the human race, there would be the joy of sexual freedom.

C. S. Lewis so beautifully puts things in his book *The Screwtape Letters*. If you're a Christian, I think a must reading ought to be *Screwtape Letters*. Screwtape is a senior tempter in hell, who sends out letters of advice to a junior tempter, his nephew, Wormwood, on how to work on the human race, more specifically, the particular person who Wormwood has been assigned to. One of the classic pieces of advice that Screwtape writes to Wormwood is as follows, "Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the enemy's—God's—ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures. All our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is encourage the human to take the pleasures which our enemy, God, has produced in times or ways or degrees which he has forbidden." An incredible admission on hell's part that they haven't invented one pleasure yet. Indeed, that bears witness to the Scripture, "At His right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

A third idea that is in error, in regard to a passage like 1 Corinthians 7, is the idea which subtly—and sometimes very overtly—undermines Paul's authority to speak as an apostle of Christ.

Basically, Paul has gotten bad press on this passage on two charges, neither of which is justifiable, as we'll see. One charge against Paul is that he is a bachelor. What right, therefore, does a bachelor have to speak in respect to marriage? A second charge against him is that he has a very low opinion of marriage. He seems to be saying here, according to a surface reading of the passage, that the only reason to get married is if you don't have self-control. One liberal protestant writer has said something like this. "It is regrettable that Paul, the bachelor, should

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have ignored so completely all other aspects of marriage and should have written as if marriage was little more than legalized cohabitation.”

As to the first charge, that Paul is a bachelor, it may very well be that he was a bachelor all his life. It may very well be that Paul, at the time of the writing of Corinthians, is simply now unmarried, but at one time had been married. It's very possible, according to Acts 26:10, that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. It says that he cast his vote against Christians that were sentenced to death. We know that casting votes was a function of people that belonged to the Sanhedrin. To be a member of the Sanhedrin, you had to be married. If Paul were a member of the Sanhedrin, then at one time he would have been married. It may have been that he was married and his wife died. It may have been that his wife repudiated him when he became a Christian. In Philippians 3:8, Paul says he suffered for Christ's sake the loss of all things. We don't know whether he was married or not, but the fact that he is a bachelor doesn't disqualify him from speaking authoritatively as an apostle of Christ. After all, Jesus himself was a bachelor.

As to the second charge, that Paul has a low view of marriage, we must remember that in 1 Corinthians 7 he is not giving a treatise on the totality of marriage. Rather, he is responding to specific questions which have been raised within the Corinthian congregation. Questions like, “Is it right for a person to get married?” “What part does sexual union have in a marriage relationship?” There were those in Corinth that were saying it had no part at all. There ought to simply be spiritual or platonic marriages. Anything other than that is an affront against God. Paul is having to respond to this very specific thing. If you want to know his total view on marriage, then look at Ephesians 5, where he compares the role of the husband and wife in marriage to the role of Christ in the church. The bride and the bridegroom. A tremendous, beautiful analogy you must remember, too, is that Paul understood a great deal about love in view of the fact that,

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under the guidance of the Spirit, he wrote 1 Corinthians 13. The view that he holds a low view of marriage can be put to rest as we seriously look at the passage before us today, which we'll do now.

In these nine verses, Paul is giving counsel to the married and the unmarried person.

#### **I. The first thing he is saying is that the Christian is free not to marry.**

He writes “Now for the matters you wrote about. It is good for a man not to marry” (1 Corinthians 7:1). Or, “It's good for a woman not to marry.” What is the meaning of this, “it's good not to marry.” Does this mean that marriage is second best? Is Paul saying it's better not to marry, but if you've got to go ahead and get married, take God's second best for your life and get married? What Paul is actually doing is not setting up a comparison. He is responding to a traditional viewpoint among some of the Jewish Christian believers, who held that the single state was a lower state of life than the married life. We'll talk more about this in just a moment. But he's saying, “That's not true at all. It is good.” That is, it is proper. It is all right. It is permissible. It is ok for a person to remain single. There is no onus that can be put upon a single person for remaining single. The King James has the phrase, “its good for a man not to touch a woman,” and some have really bent that phrase out by saying he shouldn't even shake hands or touch the shoulder or anything like that. Paul means something deeper by that, as in the modern translation, “It's good for a man not to marry.” What Paul is doing in this passage is making an affirmation—the single person is not a “spare.”

I think back to some of my earlier years in the church. In one of the churches I was a part of, there was a class for young marrieds and for single adults who were through college but who were not yet married. The church hardly knew what to do with such a class of people. So there was a class that was formed called “Pairs and Spares.” It being understood that, if you were

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single, you were the “spare,” the half that was looking around for your other half. The viewpoint has sometimes prevailed that, if you have reached your late twenties and you are not yet married, there must be something drastically wrong with you. That was the Jewish view of Paul’s day. Marriage was seen as a duty. So much so, that if a man had not married by the age of twenty, he was considered by many rabbis to have sinned. One rabbi said, “He who has no wife is no man.” Paul, in this passage, puts down the false superiority of the married person who looks down upon the unmarried person as being some lesser creature. He says, “Not at all. It is good for person, a man or a woman, not to marry. There is no sin attached to that at all. You can be a complete person and be a single person.” That is a critical affirmation.

And, by the way, it also ought to be noted parenthetically here that Paul nowhere tells unmarried women that, in the event they don’t get married, they need a “covering.” Some male who will be the covering for them. Without getting into the whole realm of this subject, it should be noted that the word “covering” in its original meaning means “to atone.” The Hebrew word “atone” means “to cover.” And the only one who can ever really cover us is Jesus Christ and His shed blood on the cross. Of course, outside of that, we’re called to appropriate and proper relationships among one another, but the concept of a single woman needing to be covered by someone else is simply an idea that is foreign to the Scripture.

What else is Paul saying here? He’s saying that a Christian is free not to marry.

**II. The second thing he is saying, and an important thing, is that whether or not you marry should depend upon the gift that you have received from God.**

Verse 7 says, “I wish that all men [all people] were as I am, but each man has his own gift from God. One has this gift, another has that.” Paul recognizes something called a *charisma*, a spiritual gift. You’ve heard the word *charisma* or “charismatic movement.” We often think of

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“charismatic” as something related to speaking in tongues or prophesying or healing or the like.

Paul uses that same word *charisma* which, in the New Testament, is never used in describing the gift of one person to another, but is always used in describing the gifts of God to His people. It's a gift of grace. It's a gift of a superior to an inferior. Paul uses that same word—*charisma*—and says, you have received a *charisma*. You have received the *charisma* of being single or you have received the *charisma* of being married. In either event, you are “charismatic.”

What Paul is saying here is that the desire to marry and to have sexual union is a gift of God's grace. On the other hand, the desire to remain single, so as to have more time and mobility to serve the Lord's work, is also a gift of God's grace. And God gives His gifts as He wills. Some have been given this gift and some have been given that. How then do you know which gift you have? Paul is saying, are you continually tempted by sexual immorality? Do you find, in your life, there is a drive which leads you to be married—so very deeply that there's no way you can lay aside that drive?

What he is saying is that there should, therefore, be a recognition on your part that God has put grace in your life, a special grace in your life which is meant to be completed and fulfilled by marriage. Paul does not beat people who have this strong desire over the head with guilt. He does not say, “Exercise more control. You've sinned.” Or something like that. No. He says, “God made you this way, and the normal channel, therefore, that God wants you to take is to be married.”

Phillips translates chapter 7:9 very expressively—and I think rightly—when he says, “I think it is far better for those to be married than to be tortured by unsatisfied desire.” I sometimes like to go back to the old commentators to find out what people were saying three or four hundred years ago. It's a little bit different than the modern writers. One such writer, Matthew Henry, in his

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commentary on this passage, has a fascinating perceptive spiritual comment on 7:9. He says, “Persons expose themselves to great danger by attempting to perform what is above their strength. At the same time, not bound upon them by any law of God. If they abstain from lawful enjoyment, they may be ensnared into unlawful ones. The remedies God has provided against sinful inclinations are certainly best.”

In other words, what Paul and Matthew Henry were saying here is that no person should deliberately try to lead a way of life which is going to surround them by temptations greater than their power to deal with. Paul, on the other hand, does not say that a spouse should simply be chosen to legalize co-habitation. What he is saying to us is, “Recognize your gift from God. The strong desire for marriage is God’s gift to you,” but on the other hand, Paul doesn’t say, “Find the first person available and marry them.” Nor does he say, “Put an ad in the Christian yellow pages.” To paraphrase another Scripture—“Lay hands on no one suddenly” (1 Timothy 5:22). We are to test out the will of God by prayer, by observation of another person’s life, by the inward prompting of the Spirit. Take time. It’s the most important decision, outside of accepting Christ into your life, that you will ever make. If you’re going to be married, that will be the most important decision outside of Christ. If you are not going to be married, that obviously will not be that important of a decision. There will be other things that God will put before you to choose. But in such a situation, we need to sanctify it by prayer, by observation of the life of the person we’re marrying, to test out whether this is of the Lord or not, and by the inward prompting of the Spirit. It is good counsel for young people to begin praying now for the Lord to have His will in your life for a life partner. If you sense, in your life, that God has placed in you the gift of wanting to be married, the gift of marriage, then, by all means, begin asking the Lord to direct you.

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I thought back to when I was a teenager. I remember I used to think, on occasion, “I wonder what ‘she’s’ doing today?” I didn’t know who “she” was. She might be living in a city or might be living on a farm. Would I meet her today? Obviously, as I look back, that kind of thing is exactly the kind of thing that Paul is saying about a gift from God. I knew that I wanted to be married. I never had a desire for the single life and don’t today. I can remember that in sermons on the Lord’s return, the only thing wrong if the Lord came back too quickly, was that I might not meet “this” girl that I wanted to marry.

We need to remember that the same apostle who wrote 1 Corinthians 7 also wrote 1 Corinthians 13, and that we ought to resist those who unfairly twist this Scripture, especially verse 9, to say that Paul is in favor of simply selecting a person on the basis of a need in your own life. It’s not what he’s saying at all. He’s saying there’s a special gift and that gift then leads you to begin to search for that person that God is calling you to.

By the way, Paul not only does not say that a spouse should be chosen simply to legalize cohabitation. But he doesn’t say that all persons who remain single have a good reason, either. Not necessarily all single persons are there because they have charisma of singlehood. Some are single because they may dread responsibility. Others are single because they prefer casual relationships. Some are single because they are selfish. Others, because they like the freedom of the single life. Others, because they are yet awaiting God’s time to reveal to them who their partner is going to be.

Paul, positively and expressively, declines to judge others by himself or himself by others. That’s the meaning of verse 6, “I say this by way of concession.” That is, it is not a command to marry or to stay single. He will not judge anyone else by himself nor let anyone else judge him by what

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he's doing. Every person must do what's best for themselves, according to their *charisma*.

According to their gift of grace.

**III. Then, in this passage, Paul deals with another topic. That is the topic that marriage brings responsibility (verses 2–5).**

**A.** He says that it, first of all, brings the responsibility of fidelity. “Now, since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” He is ruling out such things as polygamy in this passage—one husband and many wives. He's ruling out, in some cultures—like the culture my parents were missionaries to in Tibet—the possibility of one wife and many husbands. He is ruling out adultery. He is saying that there is responsibility of fidelity and total loyalty to one another.

**B.** The second thing he is saying about the responsibility of marriage is that there is a responsibility of a debt due (verses 3–5). There were evidently some at Corinth that felt that marriage could be simply spiritual and not physical. That it should be platonic. Paul counters this by saying, in verse 3, that the husband owes a debt to his wife and the wife to the husband. “Debt” is the actual word that is employed.

By the way, Paul has been accused of all kinds of things, including being a woman-hater and a speaking in favor of male dominance and superiority and all these kinds of things. It ought to be noted here that, in verse 3, he regards the obligation as a two-way street. Enjoyment is a two-way street. The husband owes a debt to his wife, and the wife owes a debt to her husband. In verse 4, Paul says that the wife does not have power or authority over her own body, but her husband. Likewise, the same applies to the husband. And in verse 5, he says, “Do not steal from one another.” That's a very precise term, “Do not steal” or “do not defraud one another except by...”

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and the word he uses in the Greek is *symphony*. Agreement. A “symphony” is something where the notes are resonating together in a chorus that has beauty of agreement.

Paul, in this passage, is not saying to a married couple, “Demand your rights of one another.”

Instead, what he is saying to a married couple is, “Meet your responsibilities one to another.”

These are important responsibilities. God created responsibilities and, therefore, they are to be met.

Some conclusions can be drawn from these responsibilities of a debt due. One very important conclusion is that Paul bases the physical relationship of husband and wife on a basis other than simply having children or procreation. He bases it upon mutual dependence for fulfillment. I think this is an important point for those in our day or past days who taught that every act of marriage between husband and wife should be with the intent of bearing a child, in order for that union to have God's blessing. That is precisely absent here from Paul's teaching. Instead, he treats marital union as an obligation that is due.

The second thing that flows, as a conclusion, is that the husband or the wife is not free to use affection as a means of reward or punishment to the other partner. Perhaps on a scale of one to ten, the most common problems in a marriage relationship are certainly related to the use of affection as a means of reward or punishment—they would rank right at the top of the list. Paul indicates that the giving of marital affection must not spring from a spirit which says, “I'll do you a favor.” But must spring from the gentle humility of grace that says, “I have this responsibility. I owe you this debt.”

The third thing that Paul is saying here about sexuality within marriage is that it is not a necessary evil to be put up with or tolerated, but it is indeed a gift from God. A special gift of God's grace. The Song of Solomon, of course, celebrates it, doesn't it? For many years,

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Christians have been somewhat uneasy about the Song of Solomon—which is to me a song of the joy of marital love—and said, “This may not really refer to an honest love between husband and wife. Rather, it must simply refer to the love of Christ for His church.” And, therefore, the Song of Solomon has been allegorized out of its original meaning. Granted, where there is a healthy relationship between husband and wife, it models the healthy relationship Christ has with His church. In that sense, therefore, the Song of Solomon is a legitimate analogy of the love Christ for His bride—us, the church. At the same time, though, God chose, within the Scriptures, to place a hymn, a poem of marriage celebration, to indicate His stamp of approval upon the gift which He Himself has created. Sexuality within marriage, therefore, is a gift of God, freely given to us by God, given freely to one another, a gift of grace.

Paul, then, goes on to say, as another logical outcome, that abstaining from marital affection is subject to three conditions. It must be by mutual agreement. It cannot be unilateral, where one person feels one way and another person feels another way. Rather, it must be by mutual agreement. Abstinence must be for a good cause, such as prayer, or maybe in other cases, we can add “such as sickness,” or, “separation because of the job or military or something like that.” Paul says, again, “It must be temporary.”

Failure to abide by these three conditions that Paul sets down may result in one or both of the marriage partners having to go through extraordinary and unnecessary agony and temptation. Thus, Paul is saying that abstaining from a relationship in marriage is both selfish and it is dangerous, and he gives apostolic counsel against it.

How do we take all this now and apply it to our lives, whether we are married or single? Many things have found their application, simply by looking at the text. I share with you this closing illustration. In our home, there is in one room a little dial on the wall which holds two things in

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it. A thermometer and a thermostat. In some homes, these two instruments are separated one from another. We all know what the thermometer is for. A thermometer is simply to report back the temperature that is in the room. If the temperature is very warm, the thermometer will tell you. If the temperature is very cold, the thermometer will tell you. The thermometer simply reads back to you the existing temperature that is there.

Not so with the thermostat, however. The thermostat is a mechanism whereby you change the temperature. What is significant about the thermostat is that the thermostat needle, if you're going to change the temperature, always moves before the temperature itself changes. If the room temperature is 70 degrees and you want it to be 74, you've got to turn the thermostat to 74, and then wait for a while for the temperature of the thermometer to actually show the room is at 74.

This, to me, is a critical analogy as it relates both to marriage and as it relates to our walk with God. You cannot successfully maintain a relationship if it is on a thermometer kind of relationship. When things are great with you, then things are great with me in return toward you. If things are icy with you, then they're icy with me. I will simply feed back the emotional temperature that you are giving me. That is a death sentence for human relationships. You cannot respond from temperature to temperature.

What Paul is saying, in this beautiful model of 1 Corinthians 7, is that there must be a willingness to live thermostatically. To respond, not as you have been responded to, if you have not been responded to in the way you want to be responded to. But instead, to respond by setting the thermostat of your response at a level which is significantly higher than the temperature of the response that you've been getting. And, by living thermostatically, one gives oneself and one's spouse the opportunity for change.

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When you look at how God loves us, then this illustration becomes so beautiful—a revelation of God's grace. God does not love us like a thermometer. When I am really on fire for the Lord, the Lord doesn't look back and say, "George Wood is doing pretty good today down there. I think I'll love him more." And when I'm really bombing out and having a real grubby day, and I'm arguing with God about what I'm doing in life, God doesn't say, "Wood's got problems today. Let's turn the temperature of love down. Let's send him a few snakes. Let's not send him any grace today."

No, if God loved us like a thermometer, we'd be in a lot of trouble. But He loves us thermostatically. He sets the degree of His love at a level that we can never come up to until we see Him face to face. He has purposed to love us, in spite of the original instance when we were yet in sin, Christ loved us. We were in sin and Christ died for us. That is love that is not reciprocal (setting the temperature at the same degree that you're getting), but it's love that is thermostatic.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God" (1 John 3:1). Look at the manner of love that God has given to us. He, therefore, loves us to a degree that wins our love. He doesn't say, "Love Me a little bit more and I'll love you a little bit more. Gradually, we'll get this thing worked out and we'll let our temperatures rise at the same time." He starts with grace as an unconditional act of grace. He loves us completely, wholly, no matter what our feelings may tell us at times or what false views of Scripture may tell us at times. Yet the fact remains that "God so loved you"—"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shouldn't perish but have everlasting life." The love of God for you is fantastic.

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God has set His love at a level which then allows you to begin to respond. But He doesn't alter that love. Hosea, in the Old Testament, is an incredible model of this, because Hosea is a story of a husband and wife. God does not tell Hosea to love his wife like a thermometer. He says to Hosea that he must love his wife like a thermostat. He must be faithful and loving to his wife, even when she has been unfaithful and unloving to him. Then God turns right around and uses that as a model for His own love, for His people. "How shall I forget you? How shall I cast you off?" A beautiful model of love.

May God help us in our interpersonal relationships. To remember that, part of living successfully for the Lord and part of the success in marriage is to pay attention to the thermostat rather than to the thermometer.

### **Closing Prayer**

Thank You, Lord, for giving us Your Word, which addresses so very clearly and specifically regarding the issues in life that we face. We do thank You, Lord, that there is no temptation in life that is unknown to You, that catches You by surprise. You've provided with every testing point a way of escape. We want to thank You, as individual persons who bow before You now, for the special gifts of grace You've placed in our life. We honor You and thank You for the gift of singleness and the gift of marriage. Both come from You. We honor and recognize You in the giving of this gift. We pray that, in the exercise of our gift that You have given, that there will be the freedom to develop that gift in Your way and in Your time. That we will not violate the gift in such a way that it ceases to bring us joy or freedom. Lord, we pray especially for the young people and others in this congregation who sense in their own life a call to be married, but have not yet come to that moment in life where they have made that choice and that decision. How beautiful Your Word is, which tells us to acknowledge You in all our ways and You will direct

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our path (Proverbs 3:6). If You have given us a gift, Lord, then You also will, in Your way and time, lead us to the enjoyment of that gift. We acknowledge Your direction in that area of our life. We bring before You also, Lord Jesus, every marriage in this church family. We ask that that marriage would be what You have intended it to be. That it would know the joy that You, the creative God, has given. That in all areas of the marital life, physically and spiritually and friendship-wise, there might be a real growing together in grace and in the love that belongs to us as Your children, that is in Christ Jesus. Now, Lord, we look to You for the application of these words, as we live out our life in everyday terms, through the week and the days to come. May Your Word sustain us. May it always be food for our heart. We ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.